

MAY 9, 1974

The drouth of the winter of 1973 and '74 ended on Monday night of the past week. Rains from an inch upwards washed the dryness away. Hombres who couldn't have exhaled without beating their chests fell into a peaceful sleep. On the following night, another inch fell.

Matters were growing serious in the Shortgrass Country before the rain. Feed bills were so high that they'd have made an auctioneer stutter. Animal life was living a lot higher than the herders were. Nerves were so edgy that you could hear coffee cups rattling in the saucers several blocks from the cafe.

The last stand of grass at the ranch was a patch of importer stuff that a caterpillar operator had swept from his pickup bed some time or other. All winter long, it stayed green and untouched. The only animal that bothered the grass was an armadillo that liked the root system. Cows wouldn't even eat the leaves.

After I discovered bow drouth resistant and livestock resistant the grass was, I swore that if I could find out the name of the grass, I'd sow it all over the ranch.

Down in Central Texas, there's an old boy who has made his living for 40 years on an armadillo farm. He doesn't have to shear of brand. The local feed store can't spell his name and the bank never heard of him.

Armadillo farming is all he does. In the spring, he cuts out the longest tails in his herd, selects his replacement stock and makes the shell end into beautiful baskets. Tourists buy him out by fall. It beats a watermelon stand every way going. Kid's don't steal armadillos and no bug known on this earth will ruin his crop.

An outfit the size of ours could fill government orders for armadillo baskets. Armadillos do good in our country. Sheep and cattle never have, so I'm seriously considering the transition.

At daybreak this morning, I watched the sunrise upon the new-washed ground. Shafts of light swept across the short sprigs of green grass. Loose horses moved in a draw to my right. Far in the distance, smoke from a wood fire curled upward a hundred feet or so. Clouds were colored by the purple that follows a rain.

Our country is a harsh master in times of drouth. Her brutality can nearly exceed what man or beasts can stand, yet when she breaks into her rain cleansed innocence, the beauty and the softness recasts the spell that holds us all.

I am going to check on that new grass. People over in town are always laughing behind my back. They are going to be sorry when the basket buyers beat a deep rutter road to the ranch. I've seen a lot of broke herders, but never have seen one armadillo farmer who was suffering at all.